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Opening Statement of Chairman Duncan Hunter
Full Committee Hearing on the FY 2006 Department of the Army
Budget Request

WASHINGTON, DC—The Fiscal Year 2006 defense budget requests \$98.6 billion for the Department of the Army, but this figure and what it covers only tells part of the story. This budget request does not include funding for a number of activities the Army will clearly undertake next year, proposing instead to fund them through supplemental appropriations. Such activities properly include the costs of operating in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also appear to include additional end strength, expansion of military benefits, modularity costs and other important areas.

While we all look forward to receiving the Administration's supplemental appropriations proposal for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2005, it is important to note that we will not get an opportunity to see precisely what the Administration proposes for these unbudgeted FY'06 activities until this time next year, 12 months from now.

Turning back to what is before us, the Fiscal Year 2006 request continues the trend of focusing on military personnel and operations and maintenance, reflecting the fact that our people are our most important assets in the war we face. The budget also continues the process of Army transformation, intended to create a larger rotation base by modularizing deployable brigades, and improving their capabilities by bringing new technology and operational concepts to the Army.

Gentlemen, we can all agree that this nation is blessed with talented and dedicated men and women in uniform who have demonstrated an ability to perform their mission effectively and adapt to unpredictable and changing realities on the ground. The successful elections in Iraq and Afghanistan are a testament to their skills and sacrifices. Just as they are doing their job, our task is to determine the policies that will guide our nation's approach to the long-term challenge of winning the Global War on Terrorism.

Even with a 4.8 percent increase this year, the President's defense budget request represents just 3.3 percent of the gross domestic product. That's a far cry from the 6 percent of GDP we spent during the Reagan buildup or the 8.9 percent of GDP we spent at the height of the Vietnam War. The stakes for our national security are not lower now and we must act accordingly.

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At the same time, we need to pay closer attention to our industrial base and the ability to mobilize our economy in defense of our freedom. In order to prevail, our industrial base must be capable of responding quickly to the changing needs of our military as it engages our enemies.

Congress has provided the military with waivers from the bureaucratic tangles of red-tape that slow up efforts to properly equip our troops; it's not clear that the Department is using them fully. Our soldiers focus on accomplishing the mission. We need to ensure that everyone in the chain of command is doing everything possible to make sure that they're not taking unnecessary risks to perform those missions. That's our job here in Washington and on this committee and I know we can count on our two guests to accomplish this important task properly and effectively.

Gentlemen, we look forward to your testimony and appreciate your appearance today. The country is fortunate to have your public service.

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